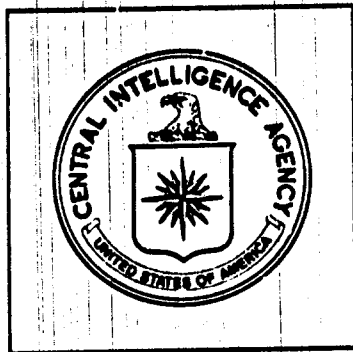


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Chile: Another Step Toward Moderation

Following up on a decision to release nearly 300 political prisoners from detention last week, the Chilean government announced yet another decree to relax political restrictions. Chileans relegated to internal exile under the military's tough state-of-siege provisions are to be allowed freedom to move about the country again on condition that they not engage in antigovernment activity or violate the political "recess." Many citizens charged under this law have been relocated to sites where living conditions are harsh and inhospitable.

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Lifting this sanction will affect 198 people--mostly leftists banished to remote areas of the country after the military deposed the Allende regime in September 1973. Estimates of the persons confined under this longstanding Chilean practice range as high as one thousand. An accurate count is impossible, however, because local authorities acting within state-of-siege jurisdiction apparently have employed this form of punishment without keeping meticulous records.

In another move intended to convey a new image, the government publicized plans to convert a major detention camp near Valparaiso into a summer resort for students. The camp was emptied recently when the government released 168 detainees last week.

Initial reaction to the release of prisoners suggests that the Pinochet government is scoring some success in moderating criticism of its poor human rights record, particularly within international organizations. If the momentum is sustained, Chile probably will become a less controversial issue on the agenda of most international meetings.

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While the freeing of prisoners has been welcomed by world public opinion as a positive step, internal security procedures are likely to remain stringent and some arrests will probably continue. Critics will continue to play up charges of human rights abuses if illegal detentions and disappearances continue. A ranking Chilean cabinet minister has suggested that recent government action is part of a "process of normalization." If so, the chances have improved for other liberalizing measures as the junta gradually recognizes that it has an important stake in convincing the world that progress is being made in restoring human rights. [REDACTED]

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